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**Insidious Morality: On the Connections between “Good Intentions”,
Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism**

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**Insidious Morality: On the Connections between “Good Intentions”,
Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism**

by

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Report

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Dedication

For those forced to endure those who are “trying.”

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It takes the support of many to reach even this far.

I would like to thank the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Texas at Austin for providing me intellectual space to complete this work. It continues to fuel my passion for intellectual inquiry. The program has given me both the challenge and opportunity to grow as a scholar, and continues to inspire my development. I would also like to thank Dr. Stephen Marshall, who supervised this effort, and Dr. Minkah Makalani. Both provided invaluable insights and commentary that pushed where this project began in a better direction. In addition, I would also like to thank Dr. Kathleen Higgins, who ushered my engagements with Nietzsche's texts and who, still, encourages my further involvement with his corpus. Any flaws that remain are mine and mine alone.

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To each of my friends who dream to end the struggle and who craft brilliant tools of resistance alongside me into the twilight hours. I thank you. You continue to point me

towards the form that socio-political alliances may take when they are forged from a “thick love.”

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And to you, Carley. Your mind and spirit give me direction and carry me home. In all of my illegibility, you remain a beacon of understanding and an example of endless possibility. Every day you (and the fuzzy friends) give me hope that one day, the words of this report will no longer be necessary.

Abstract

Insidious Morality: On the Connections between “Good Intentions”, Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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This report is delivered in two parts and aims to accomplish two endeavors. First, is to complete an examination of the insidious underside of morality identified by Friedrich Nietzsche in relation to black studies. As such, I give a brief account of Nietzsche’s critique of morality and the virtue of pity; review the debate between black studies scholars of whether Nietzsche should be utilized for the project; and further contextualizes the weighted importance of the previous debate by reviewing context of the historical condition of Blackness as identified by black studies scholars in the school of Afro-Pessimism. I argue that Nietzsche offers an opportunity to see that activism under the guise of ‘goodness’ insidiously perpetuates harm against Black folk and that it is the speech of ‘goodness’ which renders the mechanics of this violence invisible. Secondly, I argue that a Sartrean understanding of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*), reveals how the liberal Ally is able to perpetuates this harm against Black folk without guilt.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One. What if we "Suppose Nietzsche to be Black?" The Limitations of Nietzsche's Campaign against Morality in the Context of Anti-Black Racism..	9
A. Nietzsche's Campaign Against Morality: An Account of the Underside of Pity and Charitable Actions	14
B. "How Does it Feel to be a Problem?": The Fact of Blackness, an Afropessimist Reading.....	20
C. Concluding Discussion: How, Then, Can Black Studies View the Problem of Morality?	32
Chapter Two. The Maintenance of Bad Faith amongst the Work of Socio-Political Alliances against Anti-Black Racism	36
A. Introduction.....	37
B. Sartre and An Examination of Bad Faith	41
C. Sartre's Political Activism: The Liberal Mistake of <i>Black Orpheus</i>	44
D. Fanon's Critique of the Superficial Nature of Liberal Morality in Activism	47
E. Lewis R. Gordon's Characterization of the Ally: How is the Cycle of Harm Perpetuated under the Guise of Goodness?	55
Bibliography	59
Vita	62

I. Introduction:

I was delighted during my first year as a graduate student when my department informed me of its decision to sponsor my attendance to the Creating Change Conference taking place that year in Denver, Colorado. The five-day long conference hosted by the National LGBTQ Task Force purported to be a continuation of “the largest annual gathering of activists, organizers and leaders in the LGBT movement”¹ particularly focused on addressing the quotidian livelihoods and dilemmas endured by LGBTQIAP+...² and (self) declared non-heteronormative folks in the country.

These were malleable spaces, full of possibility. Characterized by its diverse attendance of folks from eclectic identities, economic statuses, languages, (dis)abilities and ages I thought that these were the kinds of spaces where authentic troubling of existing epistemic and hermeneutic boundaries were (re)negotiated and solidified. In the days leading up to the conference, I heralded it to my fellows and professors alike because it provided for alternative modes through which scholarship and epistemic production could take place outside of the exclusionary confines, powers and operative measures of the ivory tower. These were the spaces in which large groups of folks came together with the sharp intention to employ conversation, art and movement along with statistical data and policy analysis to create generative and productive strides forward towards the “establishment of the greater good.”

Despite my positive regard for the conference, I did not enter into this space with wide-eyed naivety but kept in mind the thought of the messy work which is steadily very present

¹ National LGBTQ Task Force.

² LGBTQIAP+... is a growing acronym to denote Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*(gendered) Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Ace/Asexual, Pansexual, and HIV positive individuals in non-heteronormative communities. The ellipses acknowledge the ongoing negations of signifier and the signified as more communities are declared and acknowledged in and as spaces that resist the intersectional hegemonic complexes of heteronormativity.

within cross- and inter-identity coalition building. In fact I had expected it and went in hopes to observe this particular work being done. When I petitioned my department to attend this conference, it was to examine the phenomena of socio-political alliance formation first hand. I wanted to witness how alliances were made and renegotiated across identity lines of race, gender, sexuality and age. How were intergenerational gaps bridged and new understandings of issues and activism strategies formed? Did this require compromises where folks were forced to negotiate their own needs, and what was the outcome? Were certain solidarities, such as intra-identity groups, too easily assumed and were such solidarities recognizable and beneficial to all individuals? Were ideals of inherent solidarities considered “outdated” and assigned as an improper understanding for achieving true equality? Was it possible to form socio-political alliances across identity lines, where privilege and difference are massive, based on authenticity and a mature understanding of how oppression effected each party? I was full of questions and I packed them all along with me to the conference. Here was a space where folks was armed to readily engage in the same examination.

On my fourth day at the conference, I excitedly rushed to attend a workshop entitled “South Asians Confronting Anti-Blackness”. In the entirety of the conference’s meetings specifically working on aspects of coalition building, Allyship, and racial justice, not one had contoured their proceedings to allow for an in-depth discussion about aspects of racial tension along color lines in general, let alone tensions that stemmed from “anti-blackness”. To include this term in the title of the workshop, to intentionally frame the conversation around anti-black racism in a cross-racial, cross cultural context where heteronormativity was not readily assumed, was exactly the type of moment and space I was seeking out.

In my excitement, I got to the space ten minutes early and found a spot where I could see the whiteboard clearly. The two individuals, both descendants from South East Asia, who I noted would be running the workshop, exchanged uneasy looks at my appearance. Soon after a few more minutes, three more black individuals made their way into the workshop space, and each too found places to sit. Neither person appeared to know one another, sitting randomly across the room and never speaking. At this, the two workshop proctors huddled together in the most distant corner of the room and began whispering to each other profusely, occasionally looking out into the room and its current attendants. Eventually, they left the corner, concluding their discussion by saying, in a full audible voice as they separated, “I don’t know what we’ll do, we’ll see after who else arrives and then decide what to do then.” I thought that it was an odd comment to make, but brushed it off—this was a conference workshop where technical things could be in a constant state of fluctuation, they could have just as well have been discussing the amount of materials that they did not have to distribute to the group.

However, over the next few minutes’ attendance grew steadily only this time with folks who identified as South East Asian. Each one, at the sight of the four black individuals in the room, would pause before entering, each glancing at the proctors in confusion. When the attendance ebbed to a stop around the time the workshop was set to begin, the proctors closed the doors and returned to the corner of the room where they began to whisper again to one another except this time blatantly looking me and the other black individuals. My body began to have a visceral reaction to being watched, and then I realized that the proctors were not the only ones staring, but the South East Asian individuals were as well. I faintly heard one of the other black participants a few rows behind me agitatedly mutter “what the hell are they staring at?”

My sentiments exactly.

Fifteen minutes rolled by without the workshop commencing as murmurs rolled around the room, and now a notable look of confusion was set on the faces of the other two black attendees. One South East Asian participant crossed the room over to me and asked if I was planning to stay and attend the workshop. With confusion and irritation, I answered in the affirmative: “Of course, it is, after all, a discussion on anti-blackness and measures to confront anti-black hegemony. Why wouldn’t I want to attend?” My questioner returned to their seat, muttering something about getting back before the workshop began. Visibly horrified, the proctors, who had also seemed to have witnessed the interaction, rushed to the front of the room and attempted an introduction. They noted how they had “four unexpected participants” joining the workshop that day and wanted to poll the room as to how it should proceed. One of the black participants noted that the conference program did not suggest that this particular workshop would be a closed session (to which, they were told in response, it was not) but nevertheless would leave if their attendance hindered their proceedings. The remaining three of us, were not so willing. Why would we leave if the workshop was not a closed session, and the topic on confronting anti-blackness? We were eager to be a part of such an important discussion.

Finally, one participant who it appeared the workshop was *supposedly* intended for spoke up with a point that with “black people in the room” it would disrupt the space for them and hinder them from “openly and authentically” recalling and sharing memories where they and their family had actively participated in anti-blackness, because it would place them in a position to be “attacked by others.” The proctors nodded in agreement at this point and then turned to the black folks in the room to ask us if we wanted to stay because they “didn’t want to kick us out, if we did.” I was frozen in shock that this was happening to me—in 2015 I, a black body, was being to ask to leave a workshop on “confronting antiblackness” so that non-black bodies had a

“safe space” to openly express and “work through” their anti-black sentiments without any push back. At this point, we refused to leave, and the proctor abandoned the original plan for the workshop, opting instead to foster a general conversation about obstacles to confronting anti-black racism.

The remainder of the hour and a half long session devolved into a conversation about why, for some folks, it did not serve be the greatest good at any particular moment for an individual to confront anti-black racism. The most frequently cited reason was “self-preservation”. It was not always the “greater good”, one participant pointed out, to assert one’s self against the powers of anti-blackness because it would put them in harm’s way where they could not strategically participate in “doing the right thing” when it truly mattered and made a greater impact. When I replied to their point by asking if they saw themselves as an “ally” to black folk in the struggle against anti-black racism, they replied that “of course they did.” They claimed that they did not support racism of any kind, but as an activist, had to remember aspects of self-care and self-love as well. Now, under no circumstances was I advocating for individuals to harm themselves, but the ideal struck me as paradoxical. When, exactly was the moment “right” for self-declared liberal “allies” to fight anti-black racism—a system that did nothing but harm black individuals? Was it only when it was in their best interests to do so? Did their refusal to participate in its dismantling mean that they “sided with the oppressor”? To them, the answer was obviously no. They maintained their declaration that they were firmly against anti-black racism, they were not like *bad* racists; they were not racist; they were the *good* and *moral* people; they were ultimately aiming to do “the right thing” and eventually resist racism in general.

The moments that transpired in that workshop never left my thoughts when rethinking the notion of socio-political alliances across identity lines. Now, the already complex matrix of their

construction, negotiation and operation had a new foundational element: a question of morality and goodness. How could negative moments such as the one I and three other black bodies had experienced in a setting where folks boldly and firmly declared their orientation towards “the greater good” for oppressed and marginalized folks harbor such a pungent continuation of anti-black violence?

My work became aimed to find out. Put differently, my project aimed to interrogate the connections between anti-black hegemonic power and ongoing anti-Black genocide, now critical of myths regarding “progress” towards a world of universal freedom and equality. I became especially interested in moments where neo-liberal philosophical conceptions of goodness emerged during activism against oppressive violence. The particular neo-liberal theory and praxis with which my project was still concerned with is often termed “Allyship” (and the practitioner, an “Ally”) by political and academic collectives, and references the efforts of one identity group to “assist” or “supporting” another identity group in their political struggle against singular or multiple forms of oppression restricting their humanity and potential. Importantly, I focus on the ways in which traditional theoretical conceptions of sociopolitical alliances (also known, in some cases, as political solidarity when referring to folks bound together by a similar identity) simultaneously engender violence and yet, through claims of goodness and positive intentions, both erase this enacted violence while reconstituting the “Ally” as a moral exemplar.

At this time in 2015, I had noted that there had been a historical shift in the processes of resistance movements which “claim” Allyship to certain marginalized groups—especially those centering on Black racial justice. I observed that there was a growing trend away from intra-racial “grassroots” organizing against racial oppression, moving instead toward a trans-racial (non-profit) work structure. And yet, the majority of the world’s wealth and socio-political

power still remained amongst the descendants of the Colonial Oppressor—especially white heteronormative folk. It was imperative to thoroughly grasp how these privileges associated with race, class, gender and sexual orientation both theoretically and practically intersect and inform moral intentions of Allyship so that harm against the oppressed is not maintained and further perpetuated vis-à-vis such alliances.

The following thesis emerges from that moment at the Creating Change Conference and the intellectual inquiry that continued afterwards. I wish to examine the philosophical and moral foundations upon which conceptions of socio-political alliances are made. Such an examination has lead me to investigate the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher who pursued a critical inquiry regarding the origins and mechanics of morality and the assumptions underlining the supposed duality between good and evil. What follows is an examination that unfolds across two independent chapters. While each chapter is presented as its own independent analysis, I aim for them to render a singular analysis on the problematic state of socio-political alliances across the Black-White racial binary.

In the first chapter, I provide a literature review of Nietzsche's relevant works that critically identifies and wrestles with the underside of common conceptions of morality and goodness. I then consider Nietzsche's insights into the context of ontological blackness as outlined within works focused on black (social) death—notably the school of Afropessimism. What I hope to achieve is a successful argument that advocates for black studies to seriously consider an analysis that exposes the underside of morality readily present within activist work for racial justice while also highlighting the limitations of Nietzsche's utility in the political project of black studies. The final section of the literature review presents a brief discussion of how black studies may transcend these limitations and employ the insights offered by Nietzsche

when inquiry begins from an enlightened context of blackness so that we may reconsider the notion of socio-political alliances across identities lines. The intent of the literature review is to provide grounding for the discussion which takes place in the following chapter.

In the second chapter, I continue my investigation of works within the discipline of black studies which grapple with the question of morality within the context of anti-black racism, anti-black brutality and anti-black genocide reviewed in the previous chapter. Here, I consider how it is possible for the insidious morality produced by the Ally persists. That is, what I ask what are the mechanics that keep this cycle going? How can someone who claims to be committed to racial justice, refuse to see or stop the harm that they perpetuate against those they claim to be in solidarity with? I employ a Sartrean understanding of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) within a contextual understanding of anti-black racism to explore these questions at length. Ultimately, I suggest that a Sartrean understanding of existential bad faith provides an understanding of how the preservation and persistence of harm against black bodies continues under the guise of moral goodness. By employing Sartrean existentialism alongside philosophers Frantz Fanon and Lewis R. Gordon, I argue that the liberal “ally” must entirely suspend their assumed conceptions of morality and entirely examine their existential and psychological position as a privileged member of civil society within a struggle for racial justice against anti-blackness if they are even to *begin* an engagement with political alongside black folk.

Chapter One. What If We “Suppose Nietzsche to be Black?” The Limitations of Nietzsche’s Campaign against Morality in the Context of Anti-Black Racism

In the final chapter of his work *Look, A Negro! Philosophical Essays on Race, Culture, and Politics* (and again in the forward of *Critical Affinities: Nietzsche and African American Thought*) philosopher Robert Gooding-Williams poses a provocative question to scholars of black studies: “Supposing Nietzsche to be black—what then?”³

What then indeed?

Gooding-Williams’ proposition is in direct response to a number of essays in which black studies scholars—particularly Africana philosophers and black existentialists—critically question (and ultimately antagonize) the worth of the historical tradition of western philosophy to the black radical tradition and political project of black studies. Simply put: are western philosophical works useful to black studies? Within his response, Gooding-Williams chooses to answer two essays in particular. The first, titled “Nietzsche on Blacks” written by Williams A. Preston, was printed in an anthology of Black Existentialist works⁴—the first of its kind in the field—and conducts a scornfully rigorous examination of Nietzsche’s most notable works and eventually condemns them due to their blatant anti-black racism. Preston, Gooding-Williams notes, claims that Nietzsche simply “cannot help black existentialists find answers to their own questions... [Moreover] progressive philosophers given to a serious engagement with issues like white supremacy, colonialism, black politics, and black identity—whether or not they are existentialists, and whether or not they are black—have no use for Nietzsche.”⁵ According to

³ Gooding-Williams, Robert. *Look, A Negro! Philosophical Essays on Race, Culture and Politics*. (London, England & New York, NY. Routledge Press, 2006). Pg. 129.

⁴ See *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, Lewis R. Gordon editor. (New York, NY & London: Routledge, 1997).

⁵ Gooding-Williams, Robert. *Look, A Negro! Philosophical Essays on Race, Culture and Politics*. (London, England & New York, NY. Routledge Press, 2006). Pg. 130.

Preston, Nietzsche was wholly uninterested in the suffering of Black bodies and, in fact, participated in furthering their suffering by continuously degrading them in throughout the corpus of his work. For his particular examples, Preston focuses on *Daybreak* (aphorism 241) where he saw blacks as racially inferior, and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (essay I, aphorism 7) where Nietzsche assigned black folk to be modern-day pre-historic men. By doing so, Preston argued, Nietzsche actively participated in the intellectual construction of anti-black racism—founded his own work upon its continuation, rather—and therefore has no place in black studies.

The second essay that Gooding-Williams responds to—“Nietzsche’s Colonialist Imagination: Nueva Germania, Good Europeanism, and Great Politics” by Robert Holub—designates Nietzschean philosophy as an active participant in the construction of the colonialist imagination. Gooding-Williams notes how Holub identifies the geographical area in which Nietzsche supposes that of philosophical thought resides—namely within the confines of Europe proper and at the edges of the “orient empire” (though he noted that they seem to steadily be losing this ability over time.)⁶ As such, due to his geo-politicizing of reason, Holub claims that Nietzsche lived in a “colonialist, and imperialist fantasy.”⁷ Employing his ideology further would only lead the black studies scholar in circles, trapped within the anti-black paradigm. Holub argues that Nietzsche’s construction of the colonial fantasy was not purely intellectual. Nietzsche, he argues, was an active participant in the colonial fantasy, on occasion traveling along with his sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth and Bernhard Forster—founders of the German colony of Nueva Germania—on their tourist excursions throughout their manor. He writes:

Nietzsche endorsed a supranationalist imperialism, and his “untimeliness... involves his usual way of approaching the problems posed by foreign affairs and world politics.

⁶ Ibid, pg. 131

⁷ Ibid.

Eschewing the nationalist, mercantile, and utopian/idealist approach to colonization, he developed...a conceptual framework that entitled a geopolitical perspective. In the ‘good European’ he found a term for a future elite that could overcome the nation-state, create a superior cultural life, and achieve domination of the world. With ‘great’ politics’ he offered an alternative to parliamentary life and actual colonial fantasies, as well as a vague blueprint for global conquest on a grand scale.⁸

As such, one cannot simply divorce Nietzsche’s philosophic productions from his quotidian actions. Therefore, a serious scholar dedicated to addressing black scholarship should eagerly dismiss Nietzsche’s work.

This conversation of whether or not the black studies scholar should continue to work with the products of European thinkers is not a new one, but is one of the canonical puzzles that deeply vexes the field. Audre Lorde, in her famous speech turned essay declared shortly that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” and ever since, it has become a popular mantra for encapsulating the thinking of those interested in securing feminist and racial justice when considering the worth of western intellectual traditions to such political aims.⁹

As black studies scholars continue to evaluate the “master’s tools” before them, Gooding-Williams, himself a long-time philosopher and interlocutor of Nietzschean thought, wishes to ensure that Nietzsche is not simply cast aside without a more complete evaluation. After a presentation of these arguments, Robert Gooding-Williams poses the question of what to do with Nietzsche’s work: “Let us assume that some of Nietzsche’s writings express racialized colonialist fantasies. Does it follow, from this assumption, that black and other progressives have no use for Nietzsche’s writings except to castigate them?”¹⁰ He goes on to state the negative,

⁸ Holub, Robert. “Nietzsche’s Colonialist Imagination: Nueva Germainia, Good Europeanism, and Great Politic,” in *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and its Legacy*, ed. Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998). Pg. 49.

⁹ Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” in *Sister Outsider*. (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 1984, 2007). Pgs. 110-3.

¹⁰ Gooding-Williams, Robert. *Look, A Negro! Philosophical Essays on Race, Culture and Politics*. (London, England & New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2006). Pg. 132.

claiming that a review of Nietzsche's work would provide scholars interested in racial justice a "rich labyrinth of insight that can well serve African American thought" for the very reason that Nietzsche's project was to "date *Europe*, showing *its* contingent, overdetermined product of slave morality, cruelty, decadence, and nihilism."¹¹ In other words, Gooding-Williams' points out that Nietzsche himself was very critical of Europe throughout his intellectual career. When Nietzsche writes his treatise against morality, he was also attacking a central pillar of Europe's hegemonic being. As such, Gooding-Williams suggests that black studies scholars should not dismiss the obvious anti-black racism in his writing by simply dating Nietzsche—that is, by putting him into a historical context which renders a relic his racism. Instead, perhaps thinking of Nietzsche from the perspective of antagonizing Europe will reveal "new Nietzsches", as Gooding-Williams calls it.¹²

Here then, comes his question: "Supposing Nietzsche to be black—what then?" By this, I do not take him to mean that a black studies scholar simply has to undergo an exercise to *see beyond* Nietzsche's direct connections to European imperialism and anti-black racism, and mentally darken his skin to black, but to perhaps consider his antagonisms to European empire as compatible with the overall project of black studies. What if, in a manner of creolization, reading Nietzsche's critiques of European morality and societal construction through the works of black intellectuals, Nietzsche can prove some use after all? A similar methodology has been posed elsewhere by political theorist Jane Anna Gordon in *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Fanon*, what she terms "*creolization*." Gordon defines the method of creolization as one that "does not stop in the moment of suspicion and critique that would create an impasse for the efforts of forging solidarities. Instead, it aims to build from the insights of a

¹¹ Ibid. Original emphasis retained.

¹² Ibid. Pg. 137.

wariness of highly imperfect ways in which these have been pursued so that public identities might be better constituted.”¹³ The ideal of generative and productive insights emerging from the scission of antagonisms is a helpful one to the aim of this project. I am interested in the moments where critique reveals a new, clearer realization and understanding of the ways in which morality and “goodness” operate to perpetuate harm against black bodies. I ask: Would such realizations lead to opportunities in which theorists and activists can conceptualize new ways of understanding political solidarity and socio-political alliances? Perhaps creolizing Nietzsche’s critique of European morality through discussions of Afropessimism and black (social) death render Nietzsche, as Gooding-Williams suggest, useful after all.

So, at the behest of Robert Gooding-Williams’ essay and Jane Anna Gordon’s methodology, the remainder of this literature review aims to reconsider Friedrich Nietzsche’s popular “campaign against morality”¹⁴ in the context of black studies’ sociopolitical and epistemic project to eliminate anti-black racism during a contemporary reign of popular neoliberalism and black (social) death. I will show that while Nietzsche’s deconstruction and critical examination of Judeo-Christianity’s moral and ethical mode is productive in revealing the negative—even evil—underside of virtues (namely, pity and charity) commonly assigned as a virtue associated with the “good” by society, it maintains serious limitations which requires black studies scholars to eventually depart from his matrix of thought.

What follows proceeds to (1) gives a brief account of Nietzsche’s critique of morality and the virtue of pity, (2) further contextualizes the weighted importance of the previously debate regarding the “masters tools” by reviewing context of the historical condition of Blackness as identified by black studies scholars from the Afro-Pessimist school of thought and

¹³ Gordon, Jane Anna. *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau Through Fanon*. (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014). Pg. 6.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*.

(3) concludes with a critical discussion of the productive, yet limited, contributions that Nietzsche's critiques of morality and virtues associated with societal goodness can offer to thwarting anti-black racism. In all, I hope to reveal the underside of morality in relation to a black studies context so that we may consider how it persists under the guise of goodness in the later chapter. For now, I provide a brief exegesis of Nietzsche's theory of the origin of morality and his critique.

A. Nietzsche's Campaign Against Morality: An Account of the Underside of Pity and Charitable Actions

Nietzsche's attack on morality, in its most basic form, is a two-prong assault. The first wing scathingly investigates what Nietzsche thought of as a false and commonly foolish conception of free will (the drives which constitute 'the will's' essence and its abilities), responsibility and, thus, accountability. Intellectual assessments of human agency at this time were largely informed by a traditional analysis of Platonic (and later Aristotelian and Kantian) idealism. Crudely put, the perfected *telos*—the goal which the Self orients itself towards; the precedent which points towards the perfected mold of a subject—lied within the form. As such, forms become discoverable, but can never be achieved. It is something that the intellectual could only work out through reason alone, divorced from the imperfection of physical imitation. Therefore, topics such as morality, ethics, and justice could be identified via thought experiments conducted through a method of dialectical reasoning undertaking which Plato famously depicts during his dialogues. Notably, the method of dialectical reasoning was always reserved for men.

However, as an alternative to achieving pure intellectualism in investigation, Nietzsche felt that such a move was one of annoyance and cowardice on behalf of those playing at philosophy. Such a method, Nietzsche felt, bowed away from confronting the real experiences of life, opting instead for the superficial air of nobility in presentation and thus offered nothing to

philosophy interested in pursuing knowledge about life encountered. Instead, Nietzsche, inspired by the materialist movement taking place at the time, identified elements such as morality to have a more embodied origin. It arises from the flesh—motivated and guided by the pluralistic drives of the will. In this context, for Nietzsche, lived experiences within an embodied and socially positioned context should be where serious philosophers, like the Pre-Socratics, derive truths from the world around them. Therefore, it was Nietzsche's goal that his analytical deconstruction of a morality would aid to usher a return to these as methods of such a philosophy.

On the second front, Nietzsche then assaults morality via the accusation that due to its widely applied false presumptions, it has thus hindered the growth and achievements of human potential of prosperity. By constricting a definition of human agency and its ties to moral responsibility in such an ideal form, Nietzsche was convinced that it would hinder the growth and development of society as a whole, because it would deter independence in thinking and action of those who would be leaders. In this sense, it was the amoralist, such as Zarathustra, who would have the ability at reaching clarity in transcendence above the negativity that is pervasive throughout societal mores. Otherwise, the morality would continue to weaken a society one individual at a time, as it “fundamentally remolds” them to a simple “obedience to customs”, and thus to turn away for the strength of their own independence.¹⁵ In short, for a young Nietzsche whose project was to begin antagonizing the weakness of Europe, morality had a negative, harmful underside that he was determined to expose.

Nietzsche chronicled the origin of morality as arising not from the potential limiting idyllic forms, but from the corporeal experiences of strife that emerges with the context of

¹⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. Clark, Maudemarie and Leiter, Brian eds. R.J. Hollingdale trans. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. (Cambridge University Press, 1997). Aphorism 9 and 132.

unequal power dynamics between groups. He first introduces his thoughts on the origins of morality within his work *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (section 45). Within, he details how one's position within a socio-economic caste in society will tailor one's moral development and outlook on the world. For Nietzsche, it is from this position, where one develops the somewhat simple definition of 'good' and 'evil' (or 'bad'):

The concept of good and evil has a two-fold pre-history: firstly, in the soul of the ruling tribes and castes. He who has the power to requite, good with good, evil with evil, and also actually practices requital—is, —at is to say, grateful and revengeful—is called good; he who is powerless and cannot requite counts as bad.¹⁶

“Good” and “evil” are terms which reflect power and the exercise of power. Simply put, they are nothing short of a manifestation of power relations between to status positions within society:

“Good and bad is for a long time the same as noble and base, master and slave.”¹⁷

Nietzsche goes on to develop the concept of Master and Slave in relation to the origins of morality in other works such as *Beyond Good and Evil* (section 260) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (throughout book one), resulting in Nietzsche's popularly known duo 'Master morality and Slave morality.' He quickly notes that what is required as 'good' or 'bad' within each type of morality has more to do with what is seen as virtuous from the position of the Master (the noble) or the Slave (the base, the oppressed). Therefore, while those who reside within the ruling group and thus are under the assumption of Master morality may associate the good with virtues such as courage, truthfulness, steady mindedness and being strong willed, those who are associated with Slave morality may have different views on the meaning and manifestation of those virtues. For example, the oppressed may see 'courage' as a blood lust for domination, 'truthfulness' as lies of the Master or points that only benefit the nobleman, and 'steady minded and strong

¹⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All-Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (R.J. Hollingdale trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2nd edition, 1996). Volume I, Section 45. Pg. 123.

¹⁷ Ibid.

willed’ as belligerently single-minded and stubborn. Nevertheless, what gains the reputation of ‘bad’ or ‘evil’ in Master morality becomes the traits which are readily associated with the downtrodden of society—“the anxious, the petty, those intent on narrow utility, the suspicious with their unfree glances, those who humble themselves, the doglike people who *allow* themselves to be maltreated, the begging flatters, above all liars.”¹⁸

Slave morality thus too develops along this power line, but in a mirrored fashion. Due to the fact that those identified by noble Masters to be weak are forced to submit to those within their forces as slaves, those within Slave morality come to associate ‘noble virtues’ with evil. It is a matter of regard from perspective. Virtues that the ruling class may associate with may be as aspects needed for survival by those marked as slaves. However, these survival skills may be associated with weakness. Therefore, as Nietzsche puts it, “Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility.”¹⁹ Nietzsche notes, however, that:

“in all higher and more mixed cultures, there also appears attempts at mediation between these two moralities, and yet more often the interpenetration and mutual misunderstanding of both, and at times they occur directly alongside each other—even in the same human being, within a *single* soul.”²⁰

One possible way of interpreting Nietzsche’s meaning of mixture would be to consider his pointing towards what is now most commonly referred to as ‘the middle class.’ Persons belonging somewhere in between the ruling and oppressed class may feel the parallels of both rubrics.

Nietzsche notes how this dueling in societal positioning and morality creates a superfluous interchanging of the terms ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and ‘good’ and ‘evil’ to when placed within a common context of understanding, becomes a site of that famous opposition in social

¹⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* within *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Walter Kaufmann ed. and trans. (New York: The Modern Library, 1968). Section 260, pg 395.

¹⁹ Ibid. Section 260, pgs. 397. Emphasis, mine.

²⁰ Ibid. Original emphasis maintained.

moral evaluations. For Nietzsche, this ongoing battle of moral definitions when cast within larger societal institutions—especially religious ones—eventually collapse themselves into a single dynamic of what he referred to as “herd morality.” The “herd animal man” as Nietzsche calls them, recycles the terms of good and evil without uncritical thought where the process of linguistic exchange renders the key element of morality as perspectivist lost.²¹ In this way, virtues assigned as ‘good’ are done so because they are relegated as such by the ‘virtuous’ (i.e. the powerful ruling class) and become superficially accepted in this manner. Nietzsche wishes to remind true thinkers of this fact and recall this dynamic by examining the underside of morality and its virtues.

It should be noted, however, that Nietzsche’s attack on morality is a specific one: it is specific to the takedown of western notions of Christianity, the dominant ideology on which European morality is founded upon, and continues to operate through. For Nietzsche, popular notions of moral virtues (such as pity, compassion, and charity) which emerge from this paradigm not only have the potential to do harm, but are some of the very vehicles which aid in the multiplication of human suffering as folks empathize their suffering with one another [*Mitleid*]. Pity, what Nietzsche sees as a central pillar solidifying Christianity’s griping hold on the public in particular, is a double edged sword that transmits pain and suffering to both those who pity, and those who are pitied. Nietzsche warns against feeling pity for folks, because not only is it nihilism put into practice, but it is one that actively multiplies suffering for the natural leaders of the world, and preserves those who are not long for this world. In doing so, this brings society to a sluggish standstill, as it preserves a negative outlook of failure on the world for both those who pity, and those who are pitied. For the purpose of this essay, I will focus on the dynamics which take place for those who feel pity.

²¹ Ibid. Section 202, pg. 305.

In Nietzsche's conception²², for those who feel pity for another, there are two negative effects in particular. On the one hand, while those who feel pity for others are typically the strongest members of society, these persons are placed into a position of subjection to those who receive their pity:

Pity...is a consolation for the weak and suffering because through it [the pitied] recognize that they still *have one power*, despite all their weakness, the *power of hurting others*. The unfortunate gains a type of pleasure in this feeling of superiority, of which the expression of pity makes him conscious; his imagination is exalted. He is important enough to cause pain in the world.²³

In its most crude terms, for Nietzsche, this basically places the one who is stronger into an emotional cycle of guilt. When one feels bad for another, they are compelled to act in a form of charity and thus, place a further investment into the suffering felt by the one pitied. The perceived downtrodden character's suffering becomes that of the stronger person, and a sense of abstract ideal responsibility overcomes them, making the hopeful triumphs of the downtrodden your own, but in inverse, making their failures their own. In this sense, if the pitied person catches on to this, Nietzsche feared that those who received pity would manipulate the leadership of society, causing it to further decay altogether.

On the other hand, Nietzsche identified that those who pity also have a program of deceit into play. Nietzsche, in short, questions the positionality that is necessary for one to feel that they have the ability to pity another person—it must be done so from a position of power and strength, or so it seems. However, as Nietzsche sees it, this position of strength must not be a solidified one as it appears, as the strong and capable, does not feel compelled to pity, and rebuke the grip of Christian mores all together. Therefore, for one to pity, for one to revel within the

²² This, I have pieced together from aspects throughout Nietzsche's works: *Human, All-Too Human, The Anti-Christ, On the Genealogy of Morals, and Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*.

²³ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All-Too Human*. Part 2, section 50.

false goodness of Christianity, Nietzsche theorizes that there must be ulterior motives involved. Nietzsche asks, ‘Why would the strong assist the weak?’ ‘What motivates acts of compassion and charity in the throes of pity?’ While Christianity’s pity and charitable actions are touted to be acts of human compassion, and deeds done in ‘good will’, Nietzsche identified them as acts of parasitic selfishness which feed on the weakest members of society in order to secure their own false sense of superiority. In other words, the only reason why one would act charitably out of pity for the weak, is to further nurse and mask our own sense of weakness, thus deriving our own power of domination over others in society. We act out of pity, in the name of love, for others, only to instill our sense of justice into the world around us, seeking recognition for the good acts we perform. For Nietzsche, to act compassionately out of pity for the other is a trial of multiplying suffering in order to seek glory and power, not to assuage the pain of the other.

This insight into the negative underside of morality through an examination of pity, is what gives, I think, Gooding-Williams’ argument interesting hold for black studies. As Nietzsche further identifies vectors of brutality, violence and self-destruction which operates under a guise of righteous moral actions, it opens up dimensions to question the worth of acts of charity, and goodwill towards a black subject already wrestling with the meaning of being a problem. In the next section, I elaborate on that further in hopes to further complicate the implications of Nietzsche’s claims for a subject who may stand in the position of being the one pitied, but also the one vulnerable to additional societal violence.

B. “How Does it Feel to be a Problem?”: The Fact of Blackness, an Afro-Pessimist Reading

“Between Me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me

curiously or compassionately, and then, they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce to the boiling simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word”²⁴

--W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

W. E. B. Du Bois, is often recognized as one of the earliest creators of black studies, especially with this attempt to theorize the condition of Blackness within the prevailing context of anti-black brutality. Even today, his most provocative declaration of recognizing and acknowledging the ways in which Black folk are formulated as the embodiment of “the problem” launches a project which calls into question the limitations of contemporary theory. By beginning his, and thus black studies’, prolific analysis at the crux of understanding arguably the most disenfranchised group on earth, Du Bois, then, is able to reevaluate a seemingly solidified understanding of socio-philosophical notions which governs a given society.

As such, in this section, I will attempt to follow in Du Bois’s stead, and offer an account of Afro-Pessimism, a productive school of thought within black studies, which provides a nuanced description of the “problem of blackness”: its ontological constitution and positionality within society. It is my aim, that by providing a detailed reading of the black subject, we will then be able to perform a more nuanced and sophisticated evaluation of Robert Gooding-Williams’ request to “suppose Nietzsche to be black” and examine his moral philosophy in the context of blackness itself. In other words, I aim to determine if Nietzsche’s moral philosophy (or rather, anti-moral philosophy) proves useful to the project of black studies.

²⁴ Dubois, William E. Burghardt. “The Souls of Black Folk” reprinted in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade / The Souls of Black Folk / Dusk of Dawn / Essays and Articles*. Ed. Nathen Huggins. (Library of America, 1987). Pg. 363.

Afro-Pessimism is a school of thought within black studies that posits Blackness as a form of non-positionality: Blackness as nothingness.²⁵ Blackness is defined by the negative form of ontological death.²⁶ The school of thought identifies the quandary of Black folks as the inescapable reality that a Black person does not, and cannot, exist as a human being, but instead is regarded only as flesh constantly susceptible to violence, brutality, accumulation and fungibility at the will of the Oppressor. In addition, due to this ontological nature of Blackness, Black folk are uniquely regulated to this ultimate form of subjection, or as Frank B. Wilderson III phrases it, leaving “Blacks as slaves and everyone else as masters.”²⁷

Afro-Pessimism draws its foundational thinking from the philosophical and psychoanalytic monographs of Frantz Fanon. Particular focus is given to Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask* where “assailed from all sides” by “the crisis” situation of the Black body, within he conducts a psychoanalytic study on the psychological effects of coloniality on the Black collective. Fanon begins his analysis with an observation that, for the Black individual, colonial domination and geographic confiscation, begins with linguistic indoctrination. Fanon argues, that [an individual] who has a language, consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language.”²⁸ In other words, language provides the faculty through which one comes to discern the construction and circumstances of their world. Due to the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Black folk, as a result, are robbed of the standardization of their original

²⁵ Here, I use the term “nothingness” in a Sartrean manner to harken back to an existential praxis through which one can render an examination of the ontology of blackness. This method was very popular for philosopher Frantz Fanon, of which I will discuss later in this essay. For now, a further explanation of the definition of “nothingness” see Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*.

²⁶ This definition of “death”—sometimes literal, otherwise in terms of social relativity to the polis—derives itself from Orlando Patterson’s conception of “social death” published in *Slavery and Social Death*. Within he notes how slavery renders the historical, metaphysical and ontological absence of self-relation for the slave. This “natal alienation”, that Patterson observed constitutes a key conditioning element of blackness, for Afropessimism due to its history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

²⁷ Wilderson, Frank. *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. (Durham, NC, Duke Press, 2010). pg. 10.

²⁸ Ibid. pg. 9.

language and are instead, linguistically morphed into a colonial participant. This in turn estranges Blacks from their cultural memory. This self-alienation initiates the beginning of social death because Black folks are left without the ability to articulate a world before colonization, leaving their speech at the utilization of the white other—the hegemonic colonial subject. Fanon argues that with the learning of the colonial powers’ language, also comes a negative understanding of Blackness, which is articulated to Black folk through exposure to popular media culture, state instituted education and interpersonal conversations.²⁹ Constantly being surrounded by Manichean imagery and messages that equates whiteness to heroism, light, virtue and goodness and Blackness to sinister evil, sloth, and cannibal savagery not only produces self-hatred for the Black, but illuminates the conditions of Blackness itself.

Fanon continues to study the development of the psychological disassociation with blackness through a review of adult romantic interracial relationships along the Black-White binary. He notes the intensifying of self-hatred begins to manifest itself into a desire to kill one’s blackness—sometimes through a means of biological reproduction.³⁰ Fanon’s definition of “Blackness” becomes fully sutured in the fifth chapter of his work—“The Lived Experiences of the Black Man”. Here, he comes to grips with the fact that the philosophical praxis of ontology would prove to be insufficient in the analysis of Blackness, as it is too bound up in the circular

²⁹ Ibid. Fanon examines the effect of black children who read popular comics featuring a traditional storyline of a hero’s battle against a villain. He observes that within each story, the villain is always featured with dark or black skin in relation to the hero’s light or white skin. Black children who view the story and imagery become susceptible to the desire to dis-identify with their black skin, and instead develop a yearning to become the white hero. Fanon notes the elaborate process through which black or darker skin becomes associated with traits readily defined as “evil” from a young age. On the other hand, one can puzzle out how a child with white, or light, would also come to associate dark skin with villainy.

³⁰ Fanon explicates his examination of the Black Woman coupled with the White Man in chapter two, and the Black Man coupled with the White Woman in chapter three. In summary, both the Black Woman and the Black Man are consciously in pursuit of whiteness and attempt to inch closer via the immediate proximity to their white partners. Fanon goes on to note that these Black folks also lend much attention to parroting white social norms—a mastery of education, etiquette at social functions such as parties (if they are even invited), sexual encounters (or, in terms of the 1950s Black Man, conquering) and reproduction. The desire for closer proximity towards, and the attention of whiteness plagued the Black individual’s dreams—turning them into nightmares—and re-enforced the ideal of Blackness as evil and primitive.

operation of colonial domination. In order to get a holistic analysis, Fanon instead employs an existentialist methodology. He claims that doing so creates an opportunity to honestly contend with the predicament of Blackness in full face to, as Soren Kierkegaard puts it, “See, what it sees.”³¹ The praxis of “lived experience of the Black”—this mirrored “look”—would reveal, in its entirety, the predicament of the “wretched of the earth”, those subjected to constant negation and racialized oppression. This method, what Fanon terms as the “method of regression” would satirize what colonial idealist signified as the “Negroid”—the “missing link”, a creature born of dirt and soot, the living exemplar of human primitivism³².

Through this process, Blackness is revealed as a body objectified, observed and shelved by white and non-black folks. Within this dynamic, Black problems, hopes, and dreams, point of view and values are shared continuously, easily and without fail or scrutiny and yet... Yet, at the very moment that the white and non-black other’s perspective is upon them “an unusual weight descends [upon them].”³³ The Black subjectivity feels trapped, isolated and scrutinized, as Fanon would say- “fixed” in their piercing gaze. Surrounded by suffocated air, the Black individual finds themselves, always within this area of ‘two-ness’, torn from their own “self as a body in a spatial and temporal world- such as seems to be the schema...[exposed to the world then is what lies] beneath the body schema...a historical-racial schema.”³⁴ Fanon finally stitches together his previous analysis of language, popular culture and art, education and social interactions. To speak of or encounter the “man”, “woman”, “child” “Being” and “Nothingness” is to always and only articulate “white man”, “white woman”, “white child” and, philosophically, a “white Being” and then Nothingness. Solemnly, Fanon holds his head, and faces the reality that “the

³¹ Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (Princeton University Press, 1981) pg. 25.

³² Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Mask*. (Grove Press; Revised edition. September 10, 2008). Pg. 123.

³³ Ibid. pg. 91.

³⁴ Ibid.

Black is not a man...the Black had only one destiny, and it is to be white.”³⁵ So where is the Black truly placed? He is present, yet invisible, material, yet ontologically empty. Fanon terms this space as the “Zone of Non-Being, of Non-Self and Non-Other.”³⁶ So while whiteness and non-blackness are established as a concrete set of identities, the Black body, the oppressed, is left to either play at playing these white identities—towards being that which they are not, and can never be.

The “problem” and “ontological emptiness” of blackness identified by both Du Bois and Fanon, respectfully, is further expanded upon by Saidiya Hartman’s analysis U.S. chattel slavery. In addition to the ontological disparity that Fanon outlines, in her work *Scenes of Subjugation*, Hartman identifies that Blackness is also “engendered by [constant] accumulation and fungibility.”³⁷ The ontological lack/void of Blackness creates “empty vessels”³⁸ of “human flesh”³⁹ through which non-black others can reconfigure themselves and partake in a performance of Blackness. In effect, the non-black effectively turns Black pain, anguish and suffering into their pleasure and enjoyment upon will:⁴⁰

“Put differently, the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to a projection of others’ feelings, ideals desires, and values; and, as property, the disposed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master’s body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion. Thus, while the beaten and mutilated body presumably establishes the brute materiality of existence, the materiality of suffering regularly eludes (re)cognition by virtue of the body’s being replaced by other signs of value, as well as other bodies. Thus the desire to don, occupy, or possess blackness or the black body as a sentimental resource and/or locus of excess enjoyment is both founded upon and enabled by the material relations of chattel slavery.”⁴¹

³⁵ Ibid. pg. xvi.

³⁶ Ibid. pg. 114-119.

³⁷ Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjugation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Pg. 21.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. pg. 4-5.

⁴⁰ Ibid. pg. 21.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Therefore, Hartman's intellectual move reveals that Blackness is not just simply to be regarded as an abstract thesis of social death, but is the host of to the parasitic quotidian expressiveness of life embodied by society. We are not just discussing this in theory, but are speaking of a relationship between living and breathing, everyday folks.

Building off of both Fanon and Hartman, Frank B. Wilderson III, reanimates the meta-discourse on ontological Blackness as Nothingness, a predicament he rearticulates in the terms of "the relational status, or lack thereof, of Black ~~subjectivity~~ (subjectivity under erasure)⁴² by shifting the attention away from "the so-called great emancipatory discourses of modernity—Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism, sexual liberation, and the ecology movement"⁴³—and reframing it within a model U.S. antagonisms. Wilderson's analytical move away from primarily focusing on colonialism and post-coloniality (like Fanon) and chattel slavery (as seen with Hartman) as the loci of study refigures their previous works to formally cast their collective analysis of the afterlife of slavery within contemporary modernity. Wilderson shatters the illusion of "new (multicultural) racism" with the argument that the "gratuitous violence... [against non-black folk, and their] grammars of suffering... constituent elements are exploitation and alienation", which existed in the same principle form since the late Middle Ages, as opposed to the constitutive elements of "accumulation" and "fungibility"⁴⁴, which was enacted anew at the embark of the slave ship.

Echoing Hartman, Wilderson also reveals that this condition of blackness, in addition to aiding in the definition of humanity itself, is also necessary for the political construction of Civil

⁴²Wilderson, Frank. *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. (Durham, NC, Duke Press, 2010). pg. xi.

⁴³ Ibid. pg. 20.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Society—particularly in the United States of America.⁴⁵ The socio-political structure and operation of U.S. antagonisms is based upon the ontological rationality between three positions of signification across the polity: “the White (the “settler”, “master”, and “human”), the Red (the “Indigenous”, “savage” and “half-human”), and the Black (the “slave” and “non-human”).⁴⁶ To summarize Wilderson quickly, the construction of Civil Society is foundationally set on the hierarchy of these three subjects. Within the realm of the lowest domain resides the Black—the delineation of non-subjectivity—as previously outlined by Fanon and Hartman. Reiterated by Wilderson, “the Black is ontologically constituted by slavery”⁴⁷, leaving commodification at the site of the Middle Passage inescapable and, he says quoting Ronald Judy, any effort to “write [Blackness back] into being”⁴⁸—via the production works such as Black film, literature, aesthetics, etc.—is as “productive of subjectivity...as a dog chasing its tail.”⁴⁹ At best, the production of these works—into an accumulation shall we call Black Studies?—existence is merely a form of “acting as if the Black is present, coherent, and above all human [by first] “consenting” to a structural adjustment...required for the privileging of participating in the political economy...a loan [to] theorize Blackness as a “borrowed institution.”⁵⁰ Without this loan, Blacks are as Hartman outlined, only valued as fungible flesh, naked and vulnerable to gratuitous violence and exploitation by every other race—the very anti-thesis of Humanity (i.e. whiteness). In other words, this renders the ideal of a “Black authenticity” oxymoronic, as the fact of blackness is social apartheid and death. Furthermore, this illuminates the barring of

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Summary Cover.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. pg. 42.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. pg. 38. For further discussion of such a “borrowing institution” that issues “a line of credit” of farce entry into Civil Society to Black Folks and others who reside in the undercommons and the “bad debt” the resulting feelings of guilt and crushing responsibility, please see Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013). Autonomedia.

Blacks folk's entry into, or even productive engagement with, the institution of Civil Society, as the genesis of Blackness, "chattel slavery, gave birth and coherence to both its joys of domesticity and to its struggles of political discontent; and with these joys and struggles"⁵¹ and "Civil society cannot embrace what Saidiya Hartman calls "the abject status of the will-less object."⁵²

On the other hand, the Native, or "the Red" as Wilderson terms, resides within the tier above the Black, one degree closer towards whiteness (i.e. Humanity), though they linger in limbo—regarded by Civil Society as a "savage", yet as more Human than the Black. In other words, to Wilderson's understanding, even though the Native has been subjected to horrific terrors of rape, relocation, and, above all, genocide at the hands of whites---which articulation, in a manner, acts connectively to the predicament of Blacks—the legitimate ties to the land as it resides materially under their feet, a claim that cannot be copied by folks born of chattel slavery. This enunciation of their sovereignty, though almost never respected by it is at least *recognized* as an independent ontological formation, is therefore incorporated into Civil Society, and as a result, also serves as a loci of disarticulation for the Blackness as a position of non-being.

In sum, both subjects, are dependent upon the Black and secure the ontological totality of whiteness as the definition of Humanity. Here, on the shadowed back of the Black and the blood soaked land of Turtle Island, rest the elements that form Civil Society—Subjectivity, Reason, Law and Order, Economy, and Sociality. Elements of time, space and place are solidified as constants, whereas one of these capacities are missing with the Red and Black identities. Unlike the Black body, the white individual is exempt from an antagonistic visual demarcation (that is,

⁵¹ Wilderson, Frank. *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Pg. 21.

⁵² Ibid. pg. 41. Wilderson also quotes Hartman directly from her work *Scenes of Subjection* pg. 52

their skin is not negatively marked) and, as opposed to Red whose participation is merely seasonal, their engagement within Civil Society is concretely solidified and operational at all times. However, he reiterates, through an examination Marx's notations on Civil Society's preceding's on the enslavement of White children in the Middle Ages, that those locations of stereo-typification conflict are not indicative of the ontology of whiteness, as a race, itself, and therefore, are expressions of violence contingent upon the conditional:

"In this way, White-on-White violence is put in check (a) before it becomes gratuitous, or structural, before it can shred the fabric of civil society beyond mending; and (b) before conscious, predictable and sometimes costly challenges are mounted against the legislation despite its dissembling lack of resolve. This is accomplished by the imposition of the numerous *on condition that* and *supporting that* clauses bound up on the word *if* and also by claims bound up in the language around the enslavement of European children: a White child may be enslaved *on condition that* she or he is the child of a vagabond, and then, only until the age of twenty or twenty four."⁵³

It is the white Marxist/ Socialist activist who forgets the words of their own author, Wilderson argues, and their relationship to the state of Civil Society—that it is the very fungible commodification of Blackness that make possible even the proletariat's basic commerce relationship to capital and nourishment of survivability:

"[For] it is the worker himself who converts the money into whatever use-values he desires; it is he who buys goods, *he stands in precisely the same relationship to the sellers of goods as any other buyer*...But it is frightening to take this "same relationship" in a direction that Marx does not take it: If workers can buy a loaf of bread, they can also buy a slave. It seems to me that the psychic dimension of the proletariat who "stands in precisely the same relationship" to other members of civil society due to their intramural exchange in mutual, possessive possibilities, the ability to own either a piece of Black flesh or a loaf of white bread or both, is where we must begin to understand the founding antagonism between something [the worker] has to save and nothing [the slave] has to lose."⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid. pg. 25, 16-7.

⁵⁴ Ibid. pg. 12-3.

And where the worker could not afford to purchase Blackness in the material of flesh, they made free trade use of Black fungibility as a metaphorical carrot to motivate the drive of their own revolution—driving themselves away from inching any closer to the “niggerness” where capitalism has placed them. This is worthy to note for the Black Marxist: if they are to come to a full understanding of the terms of their predicament, and seriously engage the system of antagonisms, they will have to realize the limitations of Marxist discourse—that while it may be a useful frame to think through the characteristics of alienation and exploitation, it is incapable of grasping the ontological disparity of Blackness.⁵⁵

Scholarship has identified many of Civil Society’s concrete institutions which perpetuate brutality against Black bodies. Through which, Wilderson’s theoretical conception of the matrices of antagonisms become warm flesh confined within suffocating walls made of thick concrete and steel. For example, in her popular book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander argues that the ‘after-life of slavery’ that Hartman identifies is more akin to the ongoing contemporary model of slavery. Alexander notes how, in an age where race and racism are popularly dismissed as factors that regulate interpersonal interactions during the Barack Obama presidency, Civil Society’s violence against black flesh targets black men in particular and morphs them into a mass of black incarcerated inmates. According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), black men are massively incarcerated at a rate of six times more than their white male counterparts in the United States.⁵⁶ Put alongside the fact that the United States incarcerates more people than any liberal first-world nation on Earth, one may correctly designate the system

⁵⁵ Wilderson further engages the limitations of Marxist theory and philosophy elsewhere in his article “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?” in *Social Identities*. Vol. 9, Number 2. (2003).

⁵⁶ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP. “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet”. Retrieved 2016-02-19.

of U.S. antagonisms as the top proprietor of black slavery in contemporary times. Alexander notes how the concept of (social) death of black bodies continues in the prison industrial complex, isolating them from social relationality to Civil Society (that is, disqualifies them from the ability to vote) and re-inscribes their natal genealogy within a context of fugitivity.⁵⁷

Beth E. Richie extends this observation of fugitive blackness, and therefore its definition, to include the commonly overlooked situation of black women. She argues within her work *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence and America's Prison Nation*, Richie further encapsulates the notion of black fugitivity within the confines of additional civil institutions. For Black women, she argues, the concrete institutions of civil society (criminally condemning courtrooms and legislative offices, heteronormative family structures) and its geographies (the streets of the inner-city/urban neighborhood and within homes filled with racialized oppression fueled domestic violence) become the literal prison—concrete and steel unnecessary.⁵⁸ For feminized bodies who live within the definition of blackness, the accumulative and fungible aspects of social death take on an element of sexual violence that is also engendered by the heteronormative and patriarchal aspects of civil society.

As such, an afro-pessimist definition of blackness recognizes the ways in which it is contoured by ontological emptiness as a result of natal alienation, re-inscribed as a mass of inhuman bodies that are rich for acclumulation in mass chambers of confinement and fungible for the enjoyment of civil society practices of institutionalized gendered violence. An understanding of this definition of blackness, as blackness as characterized by “a problem” will be the litmus against which, in the next section, I evaluate the worth of Nietzsche’s critique of

⁵⁷ Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. (New York, NY: The New Press). Pgs. 1-4.

⁵⁸ Richie, Beth E. *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012). Pgs. 1-31.

morality. In this manner, I hope to provide a more thorough adjudication of Robert Gooding-William's challenge to read Nietzsche through African American thought and thus view his work as a useful well of knowledge from which black studies scholars can come to understand new dimensions of anti-black racism which solidifies the condition of blackness.

C. Concluding Discussion: How, Then, Can Black Studies View the Problem of Morality?

In this final section of this literature review, I attempt such an examination. In creolizing Nietzsche's critique of morality, as Jane Anna Gordon demonstrates elsewhere and Gooding-Williams suggests scholars do of Nietzsche, through a framework of anti-black violence questions regarding the "ally's" moral intentions to participate in anti-black racial justice political initiative.

Indeed, when Friedrich Nietzsche began his "campaign against morality"⁵⁹ in 1881 with his publication of *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, it was an attack launched without sympathy or major regard for the histories of chattel enslavement, ongoing white colonial brutality and genocide decimating millions of black bodies throughout the African diaspora. In fact, it is more widely considered that Nietzsche's intents were more so motivated by the desire to uproot the various weaknesses which hindered the strength of societies existing within the domain of philosophical ability as William Preston pointed out. Nietzsche was more concerned with attacking moral virtues such as pity—and morality as a whole—in order to assist the strongest, most privileged of society to achieve more rather than coming to the aid of those constantly held in the weakest position. It would seem as though Nietzsche deliberately left what, during the time of his writing, was a readily available discussion of black folk, out of his attack

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," subsection 1 of section on *Daybreak*.

simply because they were of no concern to him; perhaps he would have considered their inclusion to be caused by his own infection of pity.

However, if there is to be a serious examination of morality in its most capable form, it must be one that departs from a position of the oppressed—most particularly, the black subject. It must be an analysis that takes into account the subject's ontological disarticulation caused by not only matrixes of religious discontentment but also hegemonic orders of white supremacy and exploitive political economy as well. Though, as I have argued, this type of analysis is nonexistent within Nietzsche's framework, by no means would I recommend that the black studies scholar shy away from the prospect of taking up an analysis of morality in its own stead as inspired by Nietzsche's project. Black bodies within the colonial matrix of domination have always had a need to question the moral and ethical modes which governs the hegemonic order in order to thwart the civil society which causes their brutality. In addition, the traditionally trained Nietzschean scholar should not reject a similar re-assessment of morality in the wake of the black subject when and where possible. Both must come to realize the limitations of what Nietzsche's insights into the underside of morality—and its championed virtues of pity, compassion, and charity—but once done so, an essential authentic conversation can finally begin.

Though Nietzsche did not launch his critique of morality from the position of the oppressive forces placed on to blackness, his consideration of the duality of morality based on social position, provides a helpful perspective from which a black studies scholar could evaluate the moral paradigm of socio-political alliances. In his work, *The Racial Contract*, philosopher Charles W. Mills also evaluates that the foundational architecture of the polity constituted by three elements: frameworks of politics, epistemology and morality. That is, if one is to

understand the social contract of racialized antagonisms which stitch civil society together, understanding it is imperative that they also examine the moralistic fibers that work to render the definition of blackness within multiple languages of metaphysical and bodily brutality.

Nietzsche's definition of Slave morality helps to posit how the vulnerability of the black body constantly maintains its susceptibility to being labeled as 'backward' and criminal and therefore always approached in that manner—even within liberal spaces of the prison state.

However, one cannot forget that Nietzsche was not trying to uncover a contract of racialized morality. For this reason, this author suggests that further work with Nietzsche's work is indeed to be undertaken, however, due to its undeniable connection to anti-blackness, scholars will have to grapple with its limited application. Even still, it is a solidified platform for new beginnings for continued analysis of socio-political alliances. For example, quandaries such as how it is that morality and narratives of "goodness" which cloak and perpetuate harm against black bodies within civil society and activism—even self-proclaimed radical social activism—is still so pervasive throughout its methodology. For the activist that truly sees themselves as dedicated to the cause of combating anti-black racism, how do they possibly not come to recognize the essential role that their involvement in the form of liberal activism plays in the stabilization of an anti-black civil society?

The following literature review has provided substantial theoretical background which fuels the author's understanding for the argument I attempt to make in the following chapter regarding the socio-political alliances. In the next chapter, through a reading of Frantz Fanon, Lewis R. Gordon and Jean Paul Sartre, I attempt to render an existential analysis of the Ally in order to provide one theory as to why and how socio-political alliances cloaked under the guise of moral goodness sustains itself. Perhaps, if considered, activists and scholars dedicated to the

dismantling of anti-black racism can forge new understandings and methods creating critical socio-political alliances across identity lines without the cost of black harm.

Chapter Two. The Maintenance of Bad Faith amongst the Work of Socio-Political Alliances against Anti-Black Racism

“They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or I fought at Mechanicsville; or Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.”

---W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

*“I am not the bearer of absolute truths.
No fundamental inspiration has flashed across my mind.
I honestly think, however, it’s time some things were said.”*

---Frantz Fanon, *White Skin, Black Mask*

“[W]hen the white American, holding up most twentieth-century fiction, says, :This is American reality”, the Negro tends to answer (not at all concerned that Americans tend generally to fight against any but the most flattering imaginative depictions of their lives), “Perhaps, but you left out this, and this, and this. And most of all, what you’d have the world accept as me isn’t even human.”

---Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*

*“Why write this book? No one has asked me for it.
Especially those to whom it is directed
Well? Well, I reply in all serenity that there are too many idiots in this world. And having said it, I have the burden of proving it.
“Toward a new humanism... ”
“Understanding among men... ”
“Our colored brothers... ”
“Mankind, I believe in you... ”
“Race prejudice... ”
“To understand and to love... ”*

From all sides dozens and hundreds of pages assail me and try to impose their wills on me. But a single line would be enough.

What does man want?

What does the Black man want?”

---Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*

A. Introduction

It is time to pause and rethink some things that, up until this point, we are sure that we already know, have proved—or learned. I am referring to what is grandly the current ideological conception of “Allyship” between members of historically oppressing and historically oppressed groups in which the latter’s human potential is restricted.

My focus on the terms “Allyship” and “socio-political alliances” versus more popularly used terms in scholarly works—such as or “political solidarity”—is intentional. Unlike the established term of “solidarity”, the emerging term of “Allyship”, and subsequently, “Ally”, within the field of activism is more associated to characterize the *spirit* of good faith itself of the minute-to-minute actions aimed to combat oppression by those who partake in activism itself, rather than the pillar of ideology that is political solidarity. In this manner, because it is not fully cemented within schools of thought, the meaning of ‘Ally’ is subject to change on the whim as individuals or organizations evaluate real-world situations and choose an action plan in response. It is in this way that the term “Allyship” still remains nebulous and, thus, malleable. It is not seriously expected to remain true to one scholastic methodology or another as outlined within a science such as “solidarity” within political theory. However, Allyship is still informed by Western thinking, and thus still bear the same pragmatic operations in respect to historically oppressed groups—this is especially true in the case of a White body’s attempt at Allyship towards Black bodies.

In the project to create “a more just and equal society”, within interracial activist circles it is commonly believed that the parameters of engagement with— and towards—members of oppressed groups have been adequately (or at least positively) established. Activists are taught to both understand and work to rearticulate such theories of solidarity during their missions through

actions in line with these schools of thought and blindly believe that they are taking steps forward to combat systematic oppression. However, we find that the opinion of those on the *receiving* end of the activist's actions based upon said principles of political solidarity is of a vastly different sentiment. While they can acknowledge to some degree that Western/White activists are acting with good intentions, the Oppressed understand that it is detrimental to ignore that activists are also, most often, operating without their consultation or input. The consultation regarding issues of oppression that *is* sought by these activists is superficial at best: Activists only seek validation and support for the mission of their activism, and have not taken the time to reflect holistically upon *how* their targeted situation of oppression came to exist and is perpetuated, or how it is *lived* by the oppressed individuals who experience it on a day-to-day basis. In Fanon's terms, they do not ask "What does *the [Oppressed]* want"? The Oppressed, in one sense or another, are aware that Western/White activists work only because they see them as "the downtrodden" characters in a tragic narrative. So, long as the Oppressed's opinions or advice is able to be wrongly aligned with and inform this narrative, and thus justify the actions of the white activist, it is an accepted one. In this manner, the Oppressed are not only robbed of the opportunity to be heard addressing their own situation, the same one that the systematic operation of Western hegemony has condemned them to in the first place, but those who try to "act in their defense" also rob them of recognition of possessing human dignity.

Society delineates Black skinned bodies to the category of blackness (and all of its derivatives) with negative connotations, thus creating the assumptions that comprise the Black body schema of superficial stereotypes and expectations that buttress a racist world. As a result, society treats the Black body in ways appropriate to all those negative terminologies. What I want to illuminate, though, is that this treatment is from the top down—from the far conservative

right to the far mainstream left. From the Ku Klux Klan white supremacist, to the “reformed” organic-vegan-sign-holding activist. Understandably, throughout the years, much attention has been given to the analysis of the former in the effort to breakdown blatant forms of racism; however, as time progresses and this form of anti-black racism becomes less acceptable, it is becoming more and more pertinent to analyze and dismantle subtle anti-black racist behaviors deemed moral, good and “politically correct.” In short, even though most activists who consider themselves “allies” to members of oppressed groups and work in some effort to combat that oppression, they often times still digress to thinking, and thus operating, under a detrimental moral theory of socio-political alliances which results in the same aforementioned problematic dynamics. They therefore recreate the same system of oppression but this time encased it with acts of good intention.

The recent emergence of Black Lives Matter aside, since the Civil Rights Movement within the U.S, we have seen a growing historical trend away from intra-racial “grassroots” organizing against racial oppression, towards a more inter- or trans-racially integrated non-profit and non-governmental organizational structure. Because the majority of the world’s wealth, and with it socio-political privilege and power, remains amongst the descendants of White Colonial Oppressors, it is becoming imperative to thoroughly grasp and understand how these social privileges both theoretically and practically, intersect and inform the intentions of Allyship. Otherwise we will continue to maintain and perpetuate existing harm against already oppressed groups. Just as important, there also exist a multiplicity of genuine interpersonal relationships between individuals from both oppressed groups and their historical Oppressors that do not wish to recreate oppression.

So my research question becomes: How is it possible to re-think Allyship using a conscious, continuously reflective and embodied philosophical approach, within the scope of a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. Furthermore how can this be accomplished in a manner that takes into account the plurality of embodied lived experiences in such a context that does not re-create the very systems of oppression it aims to dismantle? I am also interested in exploring the questions: Where, if one exists, is the place of the privileged individual within the Oppressed's struggle to obtain freedom and equality (or simply equity)—particularly for the Black communities? How are discourses of moral goodness tied up with the perpetuation of injustice? And more importantly, what keeps this cycle of harm in operation? I am going to attempt to answer these questions through an analysis of the scholastic relationship between French existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre, and African revolutionary and philosopher, Frantz Fanon as witnessed during their discussion of Sartre's text *Black Orpheus*.

It is well documented that Fanon and Sartre had an intellectual as well as a personal relationship. Both became politically involved in combating colonialism and anti-black racism and used their texts as a means to theorize the meanings of the movements that they were involved with. In addition, their personal relationship allows us to see the interpersonal exchange within their otherwise scholastic texts. As such, their exchange will serve as a case study for my examination. If successfully extracted, such knowledge may be useful for refocusing the understanding of Allyship and the institutional machine of oppression and the operations of a neo-colonial world, and thus supply us with a more productive form to dismantle it. As such, Sartre was wholly aware of how the philosophical theory of his work informed what he understood to be liberal activism against anti-black racism. In contemporary terms, he saw himself as an ally. However, as I will show by examining Sartre's own philosophical theory of

bad faith and Fanon's and Lewis R. Gordon's analysis, he too would fall into a superficial understanding of socio-political alliances and thus perpetuate harm against the very black bodies he assumes he is defending.

B. Sartre and An Examination of Bad Faith

Employing Sartre's philosophy to examine racism—particularly anti-black racism—is not a new project, not even in the primary sense. For Sartre, the 1940s and thereafter were politically charged with the international conflicts of World War II and the emergence of social and economic liberation movements such as the return rise of Marxism and the Algerian revolution against French colonialism. Sartre was undoubtedly more aware of the important influences that race and racism had in the construction of society and took many occasions in his writing to explicitly engage these issues. His works *Anti-Semite and the Jew*, which seeks to answer the question of “the Jew Problem”—which he described as similar to “the Negro Problem”, received critical acclaim.

Sartre's socio-political involvement is informed by his philosophical conceptions of the universal qualities that make up human reality. He asserts that in order to gain a firm understanding of human reality “it is best to choose and to examine one determined attitude which is essential to human reality and which is such that consciousness instead of directing its negation outward turns it towards itself. This attitude, it seems to me, is *Bad Faith* (*mauvaise foi*).”⁶⁰ The inward negation mentioned is directed towards the given condition of freedom—the ability to choose one possibility over a multiplicity of other possibilities—in attempt to evade the responsibility that it assigns, in scope of our focus, which would mean and Ally being held accountable by the Oppressed when they determine their actions to be insufficient. We can

⁶⁰ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. (New York, NY, Washington Square Press, reprint edition, 1993). Pg.87.

arbitrarily define bad faith as an attempt to negate freedom, by the attempt to lie to ourselves. It is in bad faith that I attempt to avoid an unpleasant truth in favor of a pleasing untruth (lie) within a single consciousness where I act as both the deceiver and the deceived.

Sartre explains this phenomena is possible because of the self's investment in conducting a negative mode of being. The knowledge that each human individual holds of themselves concurrently involves being at a certain distance from themselves—meaning that instead of being what we say we are, we are subject to “playing” at our ever alluding identity. In other words, as I consider myself, as an identity, I may think of self-defining attributes such as my name the biography that I have been up until this point, but instances may occur where I question whether I truly am who I consider myself to be in relation to these characteristics. This definitely occurs when I consider myself in a futuristic sense. In wondering what it is that I might become, I realize that the result can be a plethora of possibilities, and what unfolds as my new biography hinges upon the consequences of my choices and actions—phenomena that I am responsible for. For Sartre, this self-constitution marks my denomination as freedom, however, along with it also chains me with the heavy burden of self-responsibility and I become apprehensive as the “realization that a nothingness slips in between my Self and my past and future so that nothing relieves me from the necessity of continually choosing myself and nothing guarantees the validity of the values” within the choices I make in constructing my selfhood.⁶¹ I become paralyzed with fear of the world before me, or as Sartre articulated: I stand in “anguish before myself” (ibid).

At this point, the individual finds themselves in a position that not only feels this new weight of responsibility through Anguish, but they gain what he calls Despair at the realization that they are not in this world alone but are also consciously put into relationship between their

⁶¹ Ibid. Pg. 63.

Self and the world—or the Other. The actions that an individual puts forth not only constitute their selfhood, but also affect the selfhood of the Other. In this way, Sartre claims “therefore, I am responsible for myself and for everyone else. I am creating a certain image of man of my own choosing. In choosing myself, I choose man.”⁶² Here, Sartre claims that what arises within the individual defaults to a characterization similar to what his predecessor, Soren Kierkegaard, described as feelings of “antipathetic sympathy” and “sympathetic antipathy.”⁶³ By the former means that humanity finds itself in a situation that it ‘hate-to-love’ relationship with their situation—love for the power of self-constitution that freedom affords an individual in shaping one’s own life. Through the realization of his first predicament, the latter arises—referring to the weight of burden that freedom places their back. It compels one to attempt to refute his level of responsibility—to wrestle away with his freedom—for his actions through various attempts. The Being enters a conscious state of denial, a desire to commit bad faith and take up a pleasant untruth—“I am not free” or “I am not responsible”—over the unpleasant truth in hopes to flee away from the notion of freedom, claims of responsibility and having to accept accountability for consequences that transpire, or have transpired.

This feat is completed in one of two ways: by appealing to either “Transcendence” or “Facticity.”⁶⁴ By transcendence, we to place blame on one’s own, freely made choices on the circumstances of the situation, or what one’s intentions behind them in hopes to avoid the weight of the consequences for horrible outcomes on one’s shoulders. By facticity, Sartre refers to one’s body, primal or carnal instincts, or “what one cannot help but to be” to try to dodge

⁶² Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). Pg.20.

⁶³ Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) pg. 42.

⁶⁴ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. (New York, NY, Washington Square Press, reprint edition, 1993). Pgs. 281-5.

Responsibility of the state of the Self and its relations between the Others who it shares the world with.⁶⁵

C. Sartre's Political Activism: The Liberal Mistake of *Black Orpheus*

Knowledge of this existential dynamic between bad faith, freedom and responsibility, coupled with his personal desire to avoid acting in bad faith are central motivations to Sartre's political arguments against anti-black racism. While each of Sartre's political works on anti-black racism are an attempt to utilize his freedom in a form of Allyship (applying his status as a successful white philosopher to draw his white reader's attention to the gruesome realities of anti-black racism) none are as acutely purposed in doing so as his journal *Black Orpheus*. Within, Sartre attempts to take up and embody the liberal mission of noticing the "Black individual's struggled existence" within a white hegemonic and racist society *from the inside* by providing an explanation of the Negritude movement that was, at the time, gaining speed amongst black intellectuals. Sartre regards this movement as what is so curious, exotic and alluring about the Black individual to white society. As such, he tries to guide white individuals who, in the spirit of bad faith, would attempt to evade the subject of anti-black racism because by engaging it, they would be accepting the responsibility that they benefit from it.

Literally meaning "black-ness", the Negritude movement is split into two sects: the first is proposed by Africana Surrealist, Aime Cesaire, as a form of literary expression by Black individuals; the second, championed by Senegal's former president, Leopold Senghor, is argued to be the ontological "black soul", a supposedly "intrinsic black consciousness" that conditions the Black body's "black mode" of seeing the world. Sartre attempts to understand this world of what is behind the veil of white society and reports just how "the Negro copes" with their

⁶⁵ Ibid. Pgs. 284-5.

everyday subjugation. It is through poetry, Sartre believes, that the Black body can break away from the void, dead and soulless prose of White Society and both move—if only for a moment—away from oppression, into a safe haven of “rhythm” and emerge as “recognition” as a human being. It is within this particular world of dialogue between bodies within the same situation, an enclosed space from the rest of humanity, that Sartre believes rests the possibility of liberation for Blacks and is how the consciousness of the broken Black soul can repair itself.

While Sartre believes that he has completed a good moral effort of being an Ally toward the oppressed group of his “black brethren” simply because he has attempted to do more than most others in his time by trying to understand the struggle of anti-black racism, Frantz Fanon, his black colleague is not so convinced. Though he acknowledges the good intentions of Sartre’s “Allyship” and despite his rather keen insights into the Negritude movement, Fanon has many problems with Sartre’s observations. Within the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Mask* titled “the Lived Experience of the Black Man”, Fanon holds that in all of his good intentions, Sartre committed the most heinous crimes: further objectifying the individual whose oppression hinges upon their status as a superficially objectified and disregarded form. In “reporting” to his White society about “the Negro situation” Sartre, like the members of white society, once again held up a targeted group of people, as *purely and object*, thus isolating and separating them from the collective of humanity he claims to want to unite. The Black body, is observed, noted and re-shelved. Fanon himself witnesses in horror, how even his colleague, of whom he himself has studied with and held up in arms to fight the oppressive situation that racism brings, could fall into the trap of getting caught within intellectual dialogue to save face with his own community. In meeting just a few Black bodies, Sartre believed that he understood the entirety of the Black

experience, all the while missing, and enjoying his own privilege as a White Man within the realm of a White society.

In addition, what *is* presented as concerned with the plight faced by Black bodies is increasingly problematic. Not only is Sartre's report fundamentally based, in part, upon inaccurate presumptions of African historical origins of sub-Saharan Africa are solely agrarian based—as what is called Nigeria today was erected then by Black engineers. But more so, Sartre's own report on Blackness does not hold up against his *own* philosophical assertions about Being (the Subject). Existentialism, according to Jean-Paul Sartre, is “a doctrine that does render human life possible...[and] which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity”—or in other words, is one that recognizes and permits these interchanges of action between the Self and the Other, and acknowledges their impact on the world. It contends with the reality that as humans, “we are condemned to freedom.”⁶⁶ As a result, this involves a focus, almost exclusively, on the actions undertaken by human beings, positing an avenue to contend with ethical questions such as “How should one act?”, or rather, as we will see, “How should *I* act?”. It is the existential Being (sometimes referred to as “Being” or sometimes “the Self”), who is constantly trying to understand and reckon with the realities of his Freedom, who has the greatest potential to invoke the great positivity that can arise from the influence those actions have on the world around him.

So in Fanon's consideration of Sartre's conception of this existential Being (*etre*), the individual, further through an explication of the term “Being” we see the issue. While earlier historical stints of Western philosophy entertained notions of skepticism, throwing everything—the Self, the Other, and all other forms of existence outside the Self-Other relationship—into

⁶⁶ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). Pg.14.

doubt, this was not a valid concern for Sartre. He believes that there is simply what is—Being (existence)—or Non-Being (Nothingness). What needs to be clarified, however, concerns how Being (existence) manifests and positions itself within the world. In what mode is Being possible? For Sartre, Being simply *is*, the all-embracing realm that encompasses the objective open-ended world of reality. Being can be articulated in three forms: “Being-in-itself”, its nihilation “Being-for-itself” and “Being-for-others”. “Being-in-itself” (*etre-en-soi*) is the “Being of the phenomenon”—perceptions before consciousness manifests.⁶⁷ It is a plenitude that overflows knowledge itself leaving us to only say that it is. This broad term leaves us with the mission of seeking further clarification of the moment where awareness is brought into the world. “Being-for-itself” (*etre-pour-soi*) is this moment. Here, “consciousness is conceived as a lack of Being” or in other words, is the moment where Nothingness (what is not) is perceived. Once apparent, there is a desire to fill this void by assessing the options presented by the objectification of Being (*etre*) and through the process of negation—the action of choosing where the For-itself stands out from Being and judge other Beings and constitutes itself. It must be noted that every single “Being-for-itself” is the nihilation of a particular Being. The awareness of Others brings about the third ekstasis of the For-itself: Being-for-others (*etre-pour-autrui*). With this new awareness of Others, comes the realization that my Self “exists outside as an object for others to seek recovery of its own Being by directly or indirectly making an object out of me.”⁶⁸

D. Fanon’s Critique of the Superficial Nature of Liberal Morality In Activism

⁶⁷ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. (New York, NY, Washington Square Press, reprint edition, 1993). Pgs.25-30.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Pg. 800.

Fanon remembers that Sartre's description of Being is a reference to *all* human beings—man's nature itself from existence to constitution and that he in the spirit of existential humanism claims that “man has a nature; this human nature, which is the concept of the human, is found in all men, which means that each man is a particular example of a universal concept man.”⁶⁹ In other words, supposedly, unlike other exclusively featured within philosophical texts, this Being is not exceptional, it is all of us, and his focus contends with each of us on the individual level. Therefore, for Sartre to endorse a notion that Black individuals are *inherently and intrinsically* subjective and mysterious while whites individuals are fundamentally objective and technological on the other hand, is not only out of bounds of Being, but an extremely dangerous notion to hold. Furthermore, if Fanon were to take Sartre's existential writings seriously—perhaps even more so than the existentialists takes them himself—then Fanon and his readers would run into the largest hurdle when attempting to attend with this version of Being for the Black individual and their relationship to Freedom and Responsibility: they would hold inadequate.

From his realization that this is how Sartre—the supposed white liberal “Ally”—responds to the oppression of anti-black racism, Fanon gained a new clarity on the situation that he previously did not even know was an issue: “If the question of practical solidarity with a given past ever arose for me, it did so only to the extent to which I was committed to myself and to my neighbor to fight for all my life and with all my strength so that never again would a people on the earth be subjugated.”⁷⁰ However, in learning that the Ally's across the aisle regards him—“When I read that page [of *Black Orpheus*, where negritude is a mere anthropological hermeneutic of my Being as a particular form of subject as a separate exception to the universal

⁶⁹ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). Pg.22

⁷⁰ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Mask*. (Grove Press; Revised edition. September 10, 2008). Pg. 227.

claim], I felt that I had been robbed of my last chance⁷¹... [But, unlike its assertions, I know that] it was not the black world that laid down my course of conduct. My black skin is not the wrapping of specific values.”⁷² Fanon grasped that this was a new element of racism in honest operation: “anti-racist racism.” In this we find that the “Allies” project works only in assisting Black bodies in their misconstrued “fundamental existential project” of overcoming anti-black racism whilst falling to eradication in another way: the birth of a race-less society.⁷³

While it appears ideal and desirable—and bluntly, the point to this activism—Fanon’s horror arises when he realizes that, despite the goodness claims of brotherhood in their humanistic message—the world’s very constitution,—language, popular arts and culture, ethics and law, hermeneutic and epistemic interpretations of knowledge—in its “racially neutral”, form are “*white*”. In talking about “man”, “woman”, “child” “Being” and “Nothingness” and whatever falls from or in connection to those conversations, what is loudly unsaid is that we speak of a “*white man*”, “*white woman*”, “*white child*” and, philosophically, a “*white Being*” and *then* Nothingness. Solemnly, Fanon holds his head, and faces the reality that “the Black is not a man...[that] the Black had only one destiny, and it is to be white.”⁷⁴ So where is the Black truly placed? He is seen, yet unseen, being, yet not being. Fanon terms this space as the “Zone of Non-Being, of Non-Self and Non-Other.”⁷⁵ In facing the truth behind the only fate for Black individuals—and really what reality shows as the only option for all oppressed individuals—are always at the margins of the Self-Other dialogue and just outside of the zone which philosophy, especially Sartre’s philosophy and thus theories of Allyship that are derived from it. So while

⁷¹ Ibid. Pg. 133

⁷² Ibid. Pg. 227.

⁷³ Sartre, J.-P., & MacCombie, J.. (1964). Black Orpheus. The Massachusetts Review, 6(1), 13–52. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25087216>.

⁷⁴ Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Mask. (Grove Press; Revised edition. September 10, 2008). Pg. xiv.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Pg. 114-9.

[white] Being plays at a given set of identities, the Black body, the oppressed, is left to either *play at playing* these white identities—to being that which they are not: the Non-Self—or to be left in the dark of silence—invisible as the Non-Other. Fanon wanted to understand the lived experience of those living in this situation—i.e. his fellow oppressed bodies. He wanted not only get to the root of how it affects each individual, but how it shapes and misshapes the constitution of an entire people and takes it up as the mission of this return within *Black Skin White Masks*.

Frantz Fanon is desperate to “the crisis” situation of Black Man; however, instead of trying to formulate a method of progression at the forefront, he is instead interested in analyzing the psychological effects of oppression on the Black individual. Such an examination begins in the fifth chapter of his *Black Skin, White Masks* trying to articulate the heart of this experience. He starts out saying that an African Descendant initially shares a relationship with those others of his own race that “in the twentieth century, the black man on his home territory is oblivious of the moment when his inferiority is determined by the Other.”⁷⁶

Within this realm, Black problems, hopes, and dreams, point of view and values are shared continuously, easily and without fail or scrutiny and yet... Yet, at the very moment that the White Other’s perspective is added to the conversation “an unusual weight descends [upon them].”⁷⁷ The Black being feels trapped, isolated and scrutinized, as Fanon would say- “fixed” in their piercing gaze. Surrounded by suffocated air, the African Descendant finds themselves, always within this area of ‘two-ness’, torn from their own “self as a body in a spatial and temporal world- such as seems to be the schema...[exposed to the world then is what lies] beneath the body schema...a historical-racial schema.”⁷⁸ Within and written on the blackness of

⁷⁶ Ibid. Pg. 90.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. Pg. 91

our skin is the history of our slave ancestors, those who were torn from their homes and culture and indoctrinated into the colonial world as working animals without memory of their history.

Years later, after living under a White hegemonic world and thus being Eurocentricly educated, the African descendant becomes amply aware of his status within a world that has been traditionally established to hold them down in lowest trenches of society. Confused, alone, and frustrated, the African descendant tries to lash out at those who have wronged him since the very moment a European ship docked upon an African shore- a “Fuck you, Madame”- and yet this ‘rude’ response is directly attributed to the color of his skin and further ‘affirms’ the White notion that only barbarianism can, at its core, be expressed from an African descendant.⁷⁹ ‘This is an expression of the Dependency Pathology that is embedded within the race as a whole’ screams traditional White culture when their gaze fixes and analyzes the black skin he sees.

Essentially these themes return to the question of Bad Faith, yet this time it is asked of the Oppressed. Is it possible for the Oppressed to be within Bad Faith, just as their “Allies”? Fanon would answer yes—it is possible, both interpersonally and politically. We see that interpersonally—in everyday relationships—other than trying to combat the oppression of twoness by trying to embrace solely the Black identity of their being, the African Descendant, according to Fanon, have the tendency to turn in the stark opposite direction and embrace the White race in efforts of trying to become White. This is mostly done by assimilating to the White gaze, accepting that the pathologies attributed to the Black race by the Whites are true, and thus rejecting ones Black self. Fanon gives examples in *Black Skin, White Masks* of African Descendants- both women and men- who reject Black advances take on White lovers, and then in turn feel shame that they cannot fully become what they are not biologically. What’s more is

⁷⁹ Ibid. Pg. 94.

that once trapped, this two-ness holds you here locked in a never ending cycle. This is both sides of the Negritude movement- forever existing and forever critiqued as a unified whole.

However, Fanon notes that this is a tactic of survival by the oppressed Black individual—to learn to contort oneself toward the identified White objective world so that they may blend in and receive equal treatment. But what his disdain for this behavior points to, in essence, is the hatred at the loss of the subjective Black individual, and continuing, the collective conscious of an entire race of people, or a sector of humanity as a whole. It is subjectivity, the gathering of point of views and displays of media of stories, art and the experience of being black in a world not designed for black survival that needs to be protected. The objective look of the White man who fixes these connections, are to be warned against, as it holds destructive qualities to not only the competence of oppression for a race, but bars an ethical transcendence of humanity as a whole. In other words, just because the oppressed is responding to an event of oppression, it is still not wise to try to take up the tools of Objectivity over the Subjective experience or memory, it will not advance the cause against oppression, only hold it suspended.

This Bad Faith, however, naturally translates over into the political realm for Black intelligence- such as with buying into the white liberal notion of “progress” as championed by Allies. We see an example of this with Fanon’s intellectual counterpart, W.E.B. Dubois. After having analyzed their situations, Dr. Du Bois agrees with Fanon on the fact that the oppressors are never going to feel ethically compassionate enough to remove the Veil- if the oppressed are going to ever receive their unalienable rights, they are going to have to take them themselves. For Dr. Du Bois, the path for the Negro to rise out of oppression and within his country can only be carved if African American community allowed themselves to be lead forward by what he called the Talented Tenth or “the educated black elite who [is armed] with the duty lead and

inspire the rest of the race.”⁸⁰ In other words, Du Bois claimed that the education of the race and the motions of activism which they take will overall be the only thing that will lead to freedom and true democracy. The problematic of appealing to a natural order that does nothing more than construct a black bourgeoisie is “as we have seen...the inadequacies of the bourgeoisie are not restricted to economics. Achieving power in the name of a narrow-minded nationalism, in the name of the race, and in spite of its magnificently worded declarations totally void of its content, irresponsible wielding phrases straight out of Europe’s treatises on ethics and political philosophy, the bourgeoisie proves itself incapable of implementing a program with even a minimum humanist content.”⁸¹ This is because the system built for white hegemony will ultimately only sustain white hegemony, even with the occasional exception of societal inclusion in some particular way or another. Overall, both of the responses, interpersonal relationships built and political agendas of progression are “head-in-the-sand behaviors at a collective level.”⁸²

In order to get a holistic analysis Frantz Fanon also calls for this return examination of the standards upheld that characterizes the ontological make up of “the Being” in Existentialism. He claims that doing so creates an opportunity to employ the gaze of the Oppressed to finally, as Kierkegaard puts it, “see, what it sees”—not try to overlook what is obviously present—by employing the “correcting mirror” of what he refers to as a “second sight” this time around. This mirrored “look” is the perspective of the “wretched of the earth”, those subjected to negation and racialized oppression. It is through this conscious revisit to what he considers to be the “real” praxis of Existential-Phenomenology in a racist society—the lived experience of Black bodies—

⁸⁰ Dubois, William E. Burghardt. “The Souls of Black Folk” reprinted in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade / The Souls of Black Folk / Dusk of Dawn / Essays and Articles*. Ed. Nathen Huggins. (Library of America, 1987). Pg. 72.

⁸¹ Fanon, Frantz. *Wretched of the Earth*. Richard Philcox, ed., forward by Homi K. Bhabha, preface by Jean-Paul Sartre (New Orleans, LA: Grove Street Press, 2005). Pg. 109.

⁸² Ibid. Pg. 17.

that our society can find a ground to begin “correcting cultural errors”. This method, what Fanon terms a “method of regression” satire what colonial idealist typifies as the “Negroid”—the “missing link”, a creature born of dirt and soot, the living exemplar of human primitivism. It is in this way Fanon contends with the reality of his situation, and realizes his forced necessity to contend with having to reason with unreasonable “Reason, reasonably. “I threw back to unreason out of the necessities of my struggle I had chosen the method of regression.”⁸³

Though these actions appear to reproduce the colonial and racial standard, this “return” acquires both the opportunity and option for dialectical rearticulating of Black consciousness at its social genesis, what “proceeds” is an opportunity for such a consciousness *to posit itself*—to “create its normality out of itself.”⁸⁴ In other words, for Black identity to re-emerge in a manner that is not pre-assigned and affixed to Black skin, but one that is defined by the Black *individual* themselves. Fanon continues: “this dialectic brings necessity into the functions of my freedom and drives me out of myself.”⁸⁵ This derivative of freedom is one divorced from the Eurocentric; White hegemonic typical characterization of development but instead posits a history, language and socio-political assertion which bears its own unique meaning and challenges the narrative of modernity. It is in this way, how this return will be one more informed with social-realities than the one originally argued for by solely Western Existentialism. Fanon, thus in writing his own philosophy, has no choice but to consider the *violent* break from it and all his allies and fight first on a defined side as they hold themselves to be outlined within the realities of present social order. In sum, what Fanon’s break with Sartre and *ideology itself*, points to the absence of an authentic practice of Allyship—the embodiment of Critical Allyship.

⁸³ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Mask*. (Grove Press; Revised edition. September 10, 2008). Pg. 123

⁸⁴ Ibid. Pg. 134.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Let us speak further concerning this liberating violence. This violence, in the context of which Fanon is writing, is a physical one—a bloody war to free Algeria against France, and symbolically the Black body against white colonialism and racist hegemony. In embodying the full situation of a violent liberation, the oppressed body is able to divorce themselves from their own activities of Bad Faith and thus the chains of their oppression. In doing so, they are able to fight wholeheartedly against those who insist on barring them from actualizing their human potential—be them outlandish racists or “good” Allies. Contemporarily, this can take many forms. As Fanon said, he did not come with “timeless truths” so this, like every liberation, must be set within a context. While contemporary times does not mean that the need for physical violence is nil and thus cannot manifest physically, but that we mostly can do so linguistically—through debates, scholastic papers such as this one, and through political struggles of activism.

E. Lewis R. Gordon’s Characterization of the Ally: How is the Cycle of Harm Perpetuated under the Guise of Goodness Claims?

This brings us again to examining and understanding the defining of Allyship and thus a need to understand where the Ally is now and if the situation can be better. In taking up violence as guidance and under Lewis R. Gordon’s points on the two forms of racist individuals as posited with *Fanon and the Crisis of the European Man*, Fanon allows for the oppressed to see a full image of their respective Allies. Responsibility is wonderful to be taken, but Lewis R. Gordon, a Jewish-Africana philosopher—does not claim to be so sure, if it is done so frantically in relation to anti-black racism, or racist actions against Black decedents. Also of existential in terms of philosophical origin, he, picking up on Sartre, characterizes, the actor wrestling with the task of

emerging from Sartrean Bad Faith into freedom and responsibility in two forms: what Gordon terms the “Masochist” and the “Sadist.”⁸⁶

Where the Masochist indeed accepts that he is responsible for the state to the world via the existentialist sense of humanity’s relation to individual action, he is one to react with inaction or one who tries to silently disconnect with that world of oppression itself. In doing so, this ironically may appear “violent” in that such actions are almost done spitefully. Take a coffee shop that claims only to sell “free trade coffee” for example. Even if action is being taken on the individual business level, to accept responsibility and accountability by actively removing one’s own impact to the oppression of the environment or organic farmers of coffee, it really only presents itself as an action of dogmatic authority. The phrases that are commonly advertised or spoken around by the workers of the shop is may include that “we are doing what is *right*, and fair, what a shame that others don’t do the same or better.” While it is true that the their option may be more beneficial to the cause of helping the environment, or economically balancing out the exchange between Marketer and Consumer, the problem remains that the *institution* of anti-balance persists.

The Sadist Ally, on the other hand, is so wrapped up with making amends with the oppressed and combating an amount of historical guilt with the realization of his Freedom and Responsibility of action, via an existentialist relationship, that he submerges himself in constant direct contact with the oppressed, almost turning them into an outlet to discharge a buildup of the negative energy that they feel within themselves. They act with both facticity and transcendence in the spirit of Good Faith in a meta-ethic balance—with good intentions and actions—yet, they do so aggressively, with their own point of view and never take the perspective of the oppressed

⁸⁶ Gordon, Lewis R. *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. (New York, NY & London: Routledge Press, 1995). Pg. 19.

into account. Take a contemporary example of a philanthropic and Ally organization such as the United Nations Children's Fund or UNICEF for example. They act to feed millions of children around the world, but question, for a moment, just how many of the children they help, then turn around to have direct input as to how they are treated or helped, and the results come up less to none in this occurrence. Gordon classifies these phenomena as a way for the Sadist Ally to conceal the [full gaze] of the Other's perspective from himself, reducing them to a level of pure materiality, flattening out their significance into [the] landscape."⁸⁷ In illuminating more truth about both of these forms of Allies, it seems as the best to prescribe how both can become more positive and productive to not only their mission, but, above all, the members of the oppressed society. As we have to think of the notion of Allyship in a new light, and inhabit it critically: we need a Critical Allyship.

Critical Allyship as a conjoined concept merges two immense ideas. It takes Allyship as a mode of "being-in-the-world-along-side-others", and uses the framework of critical race theory as a way of understanding the administration of that being-in-the-world. In order to thoroughly grasp the ways different forms of Allyship can perpetuate and maintain harm against those groups it wishes to help by way of allying itself, it is important to look at *how* this Allyship occurs and in what context. Specifically what types of Allyship are used by which types of groups, and whose interests those groups serve and more importantly whose interests are left out, consciously, unconsciously or *dysconsciously*- in terms of the self-denial that is Bad Faith. Moreover, I posit that perhaps one can build an understanding of the embodiment of Allyship, as it currently operates, through exploring theories of action, inaction, *enaction*-a continuously conscious and reflexive evaluation of their Allyship on the basis of the Oppressed's standards only.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

While a form of Critical Allyship is currently not within operation, and though one cannot be offered at this time without further in-depth study a few steps have been advanced by this essay. The first is an explicit outline of the problematic regarding Allyship—nearly all of it both side while in the field or in the discussion of classrooms are not wholly aware exists, and yet the frustration is fully felt. Second, we now have an articulation of what factors, such as Bad Faith and the appeal to become assimilated into the Oppressor's society via everyday life or via politics, give us some markers to look for when trying to take up the role as an Ally towards an Oppressed group. It is reverently believed that once a problem is identified, then productive energy can finally be applied towards addressing the issue. Above all, due to the fact that that, as reality holds, we have one world to inhabit; it will be inevitable that all of humanity—despite the factors that make up the Oppressed or the Oppressors—are going to have to co-habitat in it together. If there is a desire to do so in harmony, then the task must be to make it harmonious, productive and positive for ever existential being.

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